

The Emergence of the Idea of Evolution at the Time of Goethe

by

Frank Teichmann

Translated by Jon McAlice

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It is obvious to everyone today that the earth has gone through a long period of evolution. We know that this also holds true for plants, animals and the human being. It is also widely accepted that this applies not only to the kingdoms of nature, but that cultures, too, evolve, as do languages and forms of consciousness. The evolutionary approach has in fact become so widely accepted that today every good textbook begins with a chapter covering the evolution of the subject itself. Keeping this in mind, it is hard to fathom the fact that the concept of evolution is barely two hundred years old. Before that time there was no comparable concept. The contemporary meaning of the term evolution is the lawful change of what are usually sense-perceptible phenomena. For the biologist “evolution is a transformation of an organism in form and behavior, with the result that succeeding generations differ from those that preceded them.”¹ Even more reflective of today’s mentality is the statement that “phylogenesis – the true meaning of evolution – is the creation of ever new programs of genetic information.”² Rarely is attention paid to the fact that it is a ‘being’ which is evolving and thereby manifesting or revealing itself in various forms of appearance. This was, however, of the utmost importance to the early discoverers of the notion of evolution. A look at the origin of the idea should provide us insight into this.

The word ‘evolution’ has been in existence since Roman antiquity. At that time, it meant the unrolling of a scroll as it was being read. Everything that the scroll contained was ‘evolved’ or unrolled. It still has this meaning in relation to the development of a thought, when what is present as a whole in one’s consciousness is articulated step by step.³ It was essentially with this meaning that Kant used the term to describe the origin of the universe out of a gaseous mist in his *General History of Nature*. There he writes that it corresponds most closely to the nature of God if the celestial bodies are ‘uncoiled’ from matter in which mechanical laws hold sway. In other words, “that the origin of the world lies in a mechanical evolutionary process rooted in the general laws of nature.”⁴

In this sense, evolution assumes preformation, the presence of a perfectly formed miniature encapsulated in the germ, which in the course of time ‘evolves.’ Whether in botany, where preformationism was widely held to be true (v. Haller) or in the history of literature at that time, it was this use of the term that was most widespread. If we examine seventeenth century novels with this in mind, we find ‘preformed’ heroes everywhere. Princes are intelligent, just, manly, brave, sometimes even able to speak from the moment of birth. The stories of their lives consist essentially in their using and preserving these character traits and capacities through a series of adventures. Imprisoned virgins are rescued, villains are slain, outlaws and the overly proud are punished and in the end, he is given the kingdom – the goal that had lived in his soul from the beginning. A good example of such a book is *Hercules and Valisca* by Andreas Heinrich Buchholtz (1659).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, we begin to see movement creeping into this rigidity of thought. Leibniz was one of the first to enter new territory. In his later letters to Lady Masham (1704), he differentiated between two elements underlying all development: uniformity, which is maintained by nature within the objects, and change, which reveals itself outwardly, “I hold not only that these souls or entelechies all have with them some kind of organic body appropriate to their perceptions, but also that they always will have, and always have had, as long as they have existed: so not only the soul, but also the animal itself (or what is analogous to the soul and to the animal, so as not to argue about names) remains, and thus that generation and death can only be developments and envelopments of which Nature, as is her custom, gives us several visible examples to help us to work out what she keeps hidden.”

This idea was only expressed in private letters and remained hidden from Leibniz’ contemporaries. It surfaced again by Herder, who took it up vehemently (“my grand theme!”). In keeping with his character, he published immediately (1774). This was his first attempt at a philosophical history. Entitled *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, Herder wrote about change and the process of becoming throughout history: “Those who have so far undertaken to unfold the progress of the centuries for the most part have in the process the pet idea: progress to more virtue and happiness of individual human beings. Should there not be manifest progress and development but in a higher sense than people have imagined it? Do you see that growing tree!, that upwards striving human being!, having to pass through diverse ages of life!, all manifestly in progress!, a striving one for the other in continuity! Between each there are apparent resting places, revolutions!, changes!, and yet each has the center of its happiness in itself! No one is in his age alone, he builds on the preceding one, this becomes nothing but the foundation of the future, wants to be nothing but that – this is what we are told by the analogy in nature, God’s speaking exemplary model in all works! Manifestly so in the human species! The Egyptian was not able to exist without the Oriental, the Greek built upon them, the Roman raised

himself onto the back of the whole world – truly progress, progressive development, even if no individual won in the process! Its goal is on the large scale! It becomes – what husk-history boasts about so much and what it shows so little of – the stage of a guiding intention on earth!”⁵

This initial sketch, in which nature was referred to as an analogy to the development of humanity, was soon revised and rewritten, thanks to Goethe’s support and interest: “Herder is writing a philosophy of history, which, as you can imagine, is new from the ground up. We read the first chapters together yesterday. They are delicious; the history of the world and of nature was just racing by us.”⁶

Beginning with a fairly simple plan which he brought progressively to perfection, Herder worked to develop the idea of the evolution of humanity. Natural evolution appears in his work as a precursor to the cultural evolution of the human race: “Air, fire, water and the earth evolve out of the spiritual and material staminibus in periodic cycles of time. Diverse connection of water, air, and light precede the emergence of the seed of the simplest plant, for instance, moss. Many plants had to come into being, then die away before an animal emerged. Insects, birds, water animals and night animals preceded the present animal forms, until finally the crown of earthly organization appeared – the human being, microcosm. He is the son of all the elements and beings, Nature’s most carefully chosen conception and the blossom of creation. He must be the youngest child of Nature; many evolutions and revolutions must have preceded his formation.”⁷ There are still many transformations to come before the human being reaches the ‘radiant glow’ of his ‘bud of humanity.’ But Nature wills to reach this stage for “nothing in Nature stands still; everything strives and moves forward. If we could only view the first stages of creation, how the kingdoms of Nature were built one upon the other: a progression of forward-striving forces would reveal itself in all evolution.”⁸ But the human being cannot count on Nature for his own further evolution. He has to “lay the foundation for his own future appearance” himself; through “spiritual exercises” he must “spin the fabric” which will once clothe him.⁹

How deeply Goethe felt himself to be connected to these ideas becomes clear in his morphological studies written some thirty years later: “My difficult, painful study of nature [searching for the plant and later the animal archetype] was lightened, even sweetened as Herder began to draft his *Sketch of the History of Humanity*. Our daily discussions revolved around the primordial origins of the aqueous earth and the organisms that have evolved upon her through the course of time. The origin and its ongoing evolution was discussed at length and through the exchange of ideas and the arguments that ensued, our scientific understanding was purified and enriched. With other friends I also had lively discussions about these topics, which interested me passionately.”¹⁰ However Goethe went on to say: “Today, thanks to broader experience and a greater depth of philosophy, there are aspects that have become visible which were hidden to us at that time.” Goethe had gained

through a “greater depth of philosophy” an understanding of Nature that was still closed to him in the 1780s. What does he mean by this?

Another source, which has fed the emergence of the idea of evolution can shed light on this question.¹¹ In his youth in Leipzig and then later, Goethe was brought into contact by Susanne von Klettenburg with pietistic autobiographies. This is a form of literature which, like journaling, lives from one’s willingness to account for the way one leads one’s life. In pietistic circles, it was also the practice to show oneself to be worthy of God’s guidance in one’s own life and to ever again examine one’s efforts to achieve this worthiness.

Pietism touched Goethe directly during his time as a student in Strasburg. There he became acquainted with Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, who told him stories of his own youth, highlighting the adventures in which he believed to have been truly under God’s guidance. Jung was raised in a simple, peasant-like surrounding and had as a child already been drawn to spiritual questions. In addition to an apprenticeship and practical training, he had trained as a teacher and taught at seven different schools in an equal number of years. At the end of this time he had experienced an illumination. A radiant cloud enveloped and permeated him with an unknown energy. In that moment, he dedicated his life “to the honor of God and to human charity.” In addition, he “made a strong and unshakable pact with God, to in the future subject himself fully to God’s guidance and refrain from all vain wishes and desires, even, if God so wished, to remain a simple working man for the duration of his life and to do so contentedly and joyfully.”¹² Naturally he proved not to be content as a simple working man, but became first a private tutor, then a doctor. Goethe met him as he was studying medicine in Strasburg. After hearing his stories, Goethe suggested that he write the story of his youth and young adulthood. Jung-Stilling applied himself to this task and sent the manuscript to Goethe, who edited it in a number of places and then had it printed without mentioning any of this to his friend. In the meantime, the latter had begun to practice medicine, but his initial success quickly took a turn for the worse. Patients came ever more seldom and the family finances plummeted catastrophically. Finally Jung-Stilling found himself with unpaid rent to the tune of seventy taler with only fourteen days to pay up or leave. “The fourteenth day drew closer and there was absolutely no indication as to where the money would come from. Time and again, tears came to poor Jung-Stilling’s eyes; he often ran to his sleeping chambers, buried his face in his hands, wept and begged God for help, and when his work called, his wife Christine would take his place. Finally the dreaded Friday arrived, both prayed incessantly as they went about their work! At 10:00 AM the postman arrived; in one hand he held the bill and eviction notice, in the other a heavy letter. Full of anticipation, Jung-Stilling took the letter. It was in Goethe’s writing, on the edge was the notice that it was weighted with one hundred and twenty talers in gold. Astonished, he opened it and read that his friend Goethe had published the beginning of his memoirs under the title of *Jung-Stilling’s Life*

and enclosed was the author's honorarium. How powerfully this tangible intervention of Divine Providence affected Jung-Stilling and his wife is indescribable; they resolved never again to stumble or doubt, but rather to bear all sorrow and tribulation with patience. In the light of truth, they also realized that the Father of humanity was leading them by the hand, that their path was right in His judgment and that He was preparing them for higher goals through such trials."¹³

Following this obvious intervention by God in Jung-Stilling's life, he wrote his publisher: "Now dearest Decker! I have to tell you that I am Heinrich Stilling. Yes it is I, I have had to walk this difficult path before I could reach the point at which I now find myself. Everything you have read in my story is truth without invention! It is strange how God passes out the roles in this flower- or caterpillar-like life of His humans. Everything is all right with me, for I am not yet finished, I am still in the smelting."¹⁴

Although Jung-Stilling experienced himself as an evolving being, he was still in a similar state as one who is waiting to see what is going to be unrolled. He had not yet taken an active part in his own evolution. This step was taken a few years later by Karl Phillip Moritz and described in his novel *Anton Reiser* (1785). This is also an autobiographical account of the author's youth. But how different was his experience. At seventeen, the author had a kind of awakening. He discovered that if he tried hard enough, he could independently guide the forces of his own thinking: "And what was at first but empty names slowly became full, clear concepts, and when he now read or thought the names again and everything grew light and radiant which had previously been dark and twisted, a wonderful feeling overcame him that he had never felt before – he tasted for the first time the bliss of thinking. A new creation took place in the forces of his thinking. It was as though dawn had appeared in his understanding and now a new day was breaking and he could not get enough of the stimulating light. From then on he was less unhappy because the forces of his thinking had begun to evolve."¹⁵ This is not the clearly experienced finger of God intervening in the course of a person's life. His part has been replaced by the individual's own, self-directed thinking. This experience was so powerful that it transcended the pietistic tradition in which Moser too was raised.

This novel was published as Goethe was working with Herder on *This Too a Philosophy of the History for the Formation of Humanity* and doing intensive botanical studies. With this preparation, he set out for Italy. On this journey, his whole structure of thoughts and ideas was soon brought into fluid motion. On September 27, 1786, he noted in Padua: "Amidst this new array of different sorts of plants, the idea emerges ever more strongly that perhaps all forms of plants could be developed out of one! This is where I have been stuck in my botanical studies and I do not yet see my way out of the confusion." Just a few months later, in Rome (February 19, 1787), he seemed to be more hopeful: "I am on my way to discovering new and wonderful indications how Nature, what an incomparable monster, lets the

manifold evolve out of the simple.” Then, not long after this in the botanical garden in Palermo, Goethe was finally able to grasp the idea of the archetypal plant. This idea, which permeates all his future work, was not merely a discovery that allowed him to bring order to a small segment of his surroundings. At least as important to him was the leap in consciousness which finally allowed him to follow in his mind’s eye the flowing, constantly changing forms. His own consciousness had likewise become fluid and mobile. Thus he wrote in the introduction to *Metamorphosis of the Plants* (1807): “When he who is called to lively observation begins to hold his own in the struggle with Nature, he first feels a strong drive to master the phenomena. It does not take long, however, before they draw near to him with such force, that he rightly feels to have cause to recognize their power and revere their presence. As soon as he becomes cognizant of this reciprocal effect, he becomes aware of a double infinity: in the phenomena the manifold nature of being and becoming and the living, weaving relationships, in himself, however, the possibility of an infinite development in that he continuously makes both his sensibilities and his reason able to respond to new forms of accepting and reaching out.”

Goethe’s observation is of the utmost significance for the emergence of the idea of evolution. This cannot be found in the environment if the fact of evolution is not first experienced within the human being. A person who is not in the process of evolving himself will not be able to recognize evolution. It is the fundamental problem of all evolutionary research. Goethe experienced this in all its consequences. He published *Metamorphosis of the Plants*. Knowing full well how difficult it would be for the general understanding of his readers, he added an introduction in which he sketched out the fundamental problem: “When we become aware of living Nature in such a way that we desire to gain insight into her being and the way she works, we tend to believe that this is best done by dissecting an organism into its constituent parts. It is true that this approach can bear fruit. But these efforts to understand everything by dissecting it do have a negative side. What was once alive lies before us separated into the elements that made it up, but it is not possible to put these back together and bring the organism back to life. This is as true of many inanimate objects as it is for all living organisms. Thus scientists throughout history have been driven to recognize the living form as such, to grasp the significance of the outer, perceptible parts in the context of the whole, to understand them as a manifestation of something within and thus to master the whole in their examinations. If we observe all forms of Nature, especially the organic forms, we discover that nothing is static or at rest, nothing is finished, but rather that everything is in motion! What is once formed is then transformed and if we wish to achieve a living understanding of Nature, we must follow her example and be just as mobile and formative as she! Each living thing is not singular, but plural; even though it appears to us to be individual, it remains a collection of living, autonomous beings, which can appear to be either similar or dissimilar.”

Even such a description can only be understood if the reader can recreate the connections fluidly in his own consciousness. If he does not do this, understanding can not be achieved. Goethe was aware of this difficulty. He characterized it in his *Morphological Notes* (1820), in which he published his findings concerning the human intermaxillary bone. In this essay he posed the difficult question as to whether it is possible to envision the bones of the skull as metamorphoses of the vertebrae. And he confessed “that I have been convinced of this hidden relationship for thirty years and have continued to study it. Yet such an aperçu, the awareness, grasping, envisioning, the concept or the idea, however one wishes to call it, do what one will, retains a certain esoteric quality. It can be spoken of in its wholeness, but not proven; one can present it in its details, but can’t quite manage to fully round it out.”

This difficulty is a question of consciousness for everyone interested in the problem. It is on par with the question as to whether one has enough strength in thinking and the capacity to apprehend relational aspects. Anyone who has insufficient training in the apprehension of mobile concepts will not be able to understand the essence of the subject. This was the painful experience that Goethe, upon his return from Italy, was to make with his contemporaries: “From Italy, with its richness of forms, I have returned to Germany, formless; the lovely beckoning skies were traded for gray ones; instead of comforting me and welcoming me back into the fold, my friends drove me to despair. My delight over foreign, little-known objects, the pain I felt at having to leave it all behind me, seemed to be as an insult to them. I missed their interest; no one seemed to understand me. In this embarrassing state, I did not know how to find myself. The loss I felt was too great for my senses to be able to acclimate themselves. My spirit strove to keep itself whole. For the past two years, I had observed, collected, contemplated and striven to sharpen all my capacities. As the gifted Greeks had striven to evolve the purest art within the context of their nation, I had hopes of slowly seeing the whole and achieving thereby a pure, unprejudiced level of artistic enjoyment. Further, I believed that I had recognized how nature goes about her work to bring forth living forms, the templates of artistic endeavor.”¹⁶

Goethe was describing his own evolution. He developed within himself the ‘art’ of ‘slowly seeing the whole.’ Nature, which also proceeds in this manner, served as his teacher. For the moment, he found himself alone with this capacity, for no one in his circle of friends had taken the same path: “It is terribly painful not to be understood, when one with great effort finally comes to the point where he believes to understand both himself and the issue at hand.”¹⁷

It is through his own development that Goethe discovered the lawfulness that governs evolution in Nature. He became aware within himself of the seed or germ that maintains continuity in everything that manifests itself outwardly. Through this experience, he searched to discover the generative, ‘autonomous being’ in Nature that in all its various manifestations remains true to its own ideal. In his papers we find a short note which characterizes

this concisely: “It is an enjoyable business to at once explore both Nature and oneself, to use force on neither her nor one’s own spirit, but rather to let the two of them bring each other into balance.”¹⁸

Having thus become aware of evolution, Goethe tried to bring the observed lawfulness into artistic form in *Wihelm Meister*. He worked on this, the first of the German ‘developmental novels,’ for many years, from 1795 until his death in 1833. Naturally, he returned time and again to contemplation of his own life and his own growth. From 1810 on, he worked on his autobiography *Fiction and Truth*. He characterized the leitmotif of this work as follows: “It seems as though the primary task of a biography is to present a person in the context of his time and to show to what extent it all works with him or against him, how he develops through this a picture of the world and of humanity, and how, if he is an artist, a writer, or a poet, he brings this to expression in the world.”¹⁹ This wholeness can only be depicted artistically, as is true for the wholeness of an ‘autonomous being’ as a living idea. Thus Goethe gave his memoirs the title *Fiction and Truth*, not as Jung-Stilling said, ‘truth with no invention.’ It is only through a consciousness of the whole that wholeness can be brought to expression.

In the second part of his memoirs, Goethe draws our attention to precisely this relationship. He introduced a “hopeful Old German saying: What one wishes for as a youth, one will have in excess when aged.” The wish he saw as a striving: “If a certain focus becomes an essential part of our nature, then with every step we take a part of this wish is fulfilled. If the conditions are right, the path of fulfillment is a straight one, otherwise it is a winding, twisted one. If one finds something that one once hoped to do being done by another, the wonderful feeling stirs within his breast that humanity in its totality is the true human being and that a single person can only truly be joyful if he has the courage to experience himself within that totality.” Thus Goethe closed the circle and arrived once more at his point of departure. For it is this relationship between individual development and the evolution of humanity that he and Herder pondered as young men. What Goethe strove for in his youth, he attained as an old man!

The idea of evolution emerged for Goethe out of the observations of his own life. What he began to have an inkling of in this context, he discovered at work in the forms of Nature. And, vice versa: what he experienced in Nature, he discovered secretly at work within his own soul-spiritual nature. Looking back over his life as an old man, he wrote: “The ever-changing display of plant forms, which I have followed for so many years, awakens increasingly within me the notion: The plant forms, which surround us, were not all created at some given point in time and then locked into the given form. They have been given a felicitous mobility and plasticity that allows them to grow and adapt themselves to many different conditions in many different places. How they can be brought together under one concept has slowly become clear to me and that this conception can be enlivened at a higher of level [of consciousness]: thus I began to recognize in the sense

perceptible form a supersensible archetype. Whoever has felt what a rich, saturated thought has to say, will admit what a passionate movement comes to life in the spirit when we are enthused, and we anticipate the totality of what will evolve step by step.”²⁰

Initial definition of the concept of evolution

Goethe’s insights were gained from his own sense of his evolving self. They do not, however, contain a concept of evolution. This step was taken by the German idealists, who all developed their ideas based on Goethe’s work. In the introduction to his book *History of Philosophy*, Hegel characterized the situation in which he found himself. “Evolution is an idea that is bandied about all the time. One of the specialties of philosophy is to examine what is thought to be known. Those things that are applied and used without being examined, the things used to simply get through life, are precisely what is most unknown for those who are not philosophically trained.” Hegel then tried in a roundabout, yet fundamental manner to, in thinking, grasp the idea of evolution. To begin with, he differentiated, as did Leibniz before him, between two elements: the idea which evolved and the articulated, mobile manifestation. To these comes the content of the idea itself. This is always concrete. Evolution consists in the working together of these three elements: “What is true and defined unto itself, bears within it the drive to evolve. Only what is alive, the spiritual, is active within and evolves. The idea – in itself concrete and evolving – is an organic system, a wholeness that bears within itself a wealth of stages and moments.” Wherever something was evolving, Hegel recognized a living spirit, an idea at work. From this point of departure, he turned to an examination of the history of philosophy, characterizing it as a sequential blossoming of the human spirit: “Philosophy is itself the cognition of this evolution and is, as conceptual thinking, itself the cognized evolution. The further this path of evolution proceeds, the closer philosophy comes to perfection.”

Besides Hegel, it is Schelling who struggles most at that time to understand this idea. In his fragmentary work *The Age of the Earth*, he begins with inner unity or oneness: “If, by any process of evolution, the inner unity of the evolving subject is assumed, then it follows conclusively that each system has but one subject, one living being evolving itself within it. Thus it is in principle impossible to form a definitive, static concept, for since it is in continuous motion, progress, enhancement, any concept can only hold true for a moment; as a living organism it is in fact not one, but many. We see from this that there is no point in the living wholeness of scientific art, where one can stop or that one can hold on to, but that only by waiting for the evolution of the whole is it possible to express the concept of the evolving subject in its totality. The subject is present as well in the middle and at the end, as it is at the beginning, and it is not what it is at any given point; it is in truth not singular, but rather both one and all. Whoever attributes a protean nature to the subject of any given process of evolution has come closer to the

truth than he may realize.” This characterization of evolution shows clearly just how close Schelling was to Goethe. Not only the last remark, but also the terms used point to this relationship: “continuous motion,” “progress,” “enhancement,” and so forth, show the close connection between the two great thinkers.

The third in this club is Fichte, who applied the idea of evolution in his work on the history of philosophy. In *Foundations of the Present Time* and *Talk to the German Nation* (1806), he took up the ideas articulated twenty years earlier by Herder and developed them further.

How strongly Goethe felt himself to be challenged by the clarity of the idealist philosophers comes to expression in his second collection of *Morphological Notes* (1820) in an essay entitled *Effects of the New Philosophy*. He began this essay with a description of how he had developed an artistic method which allowed him to apprehend Nature’s working. Then he continued: “Further progress I owe to Niethammern who has attempted with friendly tenacity to help me solve the main riddles and understand the concepts and expressions. What I owe to Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, the von Humbolt brothers, and Schlegel should gratefully come to fruition in the future, especially if I have the chance to sketch out the events of the last decade of the last century.”

Goethe emphasized at other times his debt to the different thinkers, and vice versa. None of the great philosophers would have been able to envision the idea of evolution were it not for Goethe’s work. They are all in agreement in the formation of the concept: They recognize evolution as taking place between the activity of a spiritual being – which always remains identical with itself – and its changing manifestation through the course of time. Whenever we use the term evolution, we should keep in mind that we are speaking of a being! Even if we are focussed for the moment on the sense-perceptible manifestation, it does not mean that the being does not exist, merely that we have, for the moment, forgotten it.

The spiritual dimension

The ancient, static view of the world was brought into motion by the discovery of the idea of evolution. The question arose as to how evolution happens, what are the stages that something passes through in the course of time. This new fluidity of ideas was not bound solely to the examination of Nature. The earth, the plants, the animals, the human being, peoples, cultures and their languages had all gone through long processes of evolution. The great thinkers and scientists of the nineteenth century focussed the efforts on placing ever-new phenomena within the context of evolution.

Less visible are the results of those thinkers who applied the idea of evolution to spiritual phenomena. One of the major contributions made in this realm was the exhaustive study of the evolution of human consciousness done by Immanuel Hermann Fichte, the son of the great philosophical idealist. In the first volume of his *Basic Principles of a System of Philosophy* (1833), he addressed the question of how consciousness evolves to reach the point

of desiring to embark on philosophical explorations. This is a matter of choice. But then “it educates itself to philosophy, which is not only the beginning of consciousness but its own proof of itself. Thus the first part of the system contains the scientifically founded evolutionary history of consciousness towards and in thinking, and also an excursus on the possible relation of thinking to truth.”²¹ Here we also find the observation that thinking itself must reach a certain stage of development to be able to grasp its own evolution. To do so it has to be able to place itself within the focus of its examination. Fichte called this most sublime level of thinking, at which the thinker not only thinks but at the same time consciously examines the activity of his own thinking, a “speculative, beholding knowing.” It is the highest stage of spiritual activity. It does evolve itself naturally, only through untiring, self-directed spiritual practice. Consciousness has to want to educate itself.

What Fichte wrote concerning thinking was expanded by Rudolf Steiner at the end of the nineteenth century to include the totality of human experience. The human being has reached a stage in his development at which there is no further natural evolution. The natural course of evolution has led him to the emergence of self-directed thinking. With this, he has the capacity to take his own future evolution into his own hands, and in so doing to give it a direction which he determines. The idea of the human being is thus one which does not contain all its possible manifestations. Evolution guides the individual to a certain stage of development, then sets him free. “The perceptual object ‘human’ has in him/her the possibility of transforming him/herself, just as the plant seed contains the possibility of becoming a complete plant. The plant transforms itself because of the objective law inherent in it; the human being remains in his incomplete state unless he takes hold of the material for transformation within him and transforms himself through his own power. Nature makes of man merely a natural being; society makes of him a law-abiding being; only he himself can make of himself a free man. Nature releases man from her fetters at a definite stage in his development; society carries this development a stage further; he alone can give himself the final polish.”²²

What Goethe indicated with the saying, “What one wishes for as a youth, one will have in excess when aged,” would have to be changed somewhat based on a modern understanding of the path of spiritual evolution: The goal towards which one through practice strives, he will one day reach. Goethe had set himself such a spiritual goal, and in spite of various hindrances, remained true to it throughout his life, evolving himself as he went. As a fruit of this striving, he was able to bring the idea of evolution to light. Through this individual effort, it has become possible for us to find ourselves in a stream of individual development with the goal of becoming a freely-choosing human being who can set his own goals. It is at the beginning of this process of evolution that we find ourselves today.

Footnotes:

1. W. Zimmermann, *Evolution*, Freiburg/Munich, 1952.
2. Franz Wuketits, *Grundriss der Evolutionstheorie*, Darmstadt, 1980.
3. Cicero, Top 9.
4. J.H.Kant, Akad.A.1.
5. Hanser Edition B1.
6. Letter from Goethe to Knebel (1783).
7. *Thoughts on a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, 1784, Book 1.
8. Op.cit. Book 5.
9. Op.cit. Book 5.
10. J.W.von Goethe, *Morphological Studies*, 1817.
11. My thanks to Prof. R. Habel, Marburg, for suggesting this connection.
12. H. Jung-Stilling, *Story of My Life*, Book 2, Darmstadt, 1976.
13. Op.cit. Book 3, 1789.
14. Op.cit.
15. Karl Phillip Moritz, *Anton Reiser*, Reclam-Universalbibliotheks-Ausgabe.
16. J.W.von Goethe, *Morphological Studies*, 1817.
17. Op.cit.
18. J.W.von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, Nr. 1140.
19. J.W.von Goethe, *Fiction and Truth*, Part 1.
20. J.W.von Goethe, *Story of My Botanical Studies*, 1831.
21. I.H.Fichte, *Knowledge as Self-knowledge*, 1831.
22. Rudolf Steiner, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, London 1979.